(e) the concrete steps and measures Government proposes to take to improve Rabi output and to give protection to Rabi seeds?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (PROF. K.V. THOMAS): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. Delayed deficient and erratic rainfall during, 2009 has adversely affected Kharif food grain output by around 18% (as per first Advance Estimate 2009-10).

(c) Food prices depend on several factors such as production within the country and globally, climatic conditions, dietary preferences of consumers, overall economic growth etc. To mitigate the effect of drought and to stabilize the food prices in the country, minimum support price of rice and wheat has been increased for Kharif and Rabi Marketing Seasons. Export of non-basmati rice has been banned and import of wheat and rice on private account at zero duty is allowed. Central issue price of wheat and rice has not been increased since 1.7.2002 to lessen burden of inflation on the poor. State Governments have been requested to maximize the procurement of rice by opening sufficient procurement centers and other necessary arrangement for procurement of paddy and its milling.

(d) In view of recent drought, the distribution subsidy on certified seeds under various programmes/schemes namely Integrated Scheme on Oilseed, Pulses, Oil Palm and Maize (ISOPOM), National Food Security Mission (NFSM) and Macro Management Mode of Agriculture (MMA) has been enhanced with an additional estimated subsidy of Rs.288.26 Crores for distribution of certified seeds during current Rabi Season.

(e) Government of India has taken several other initiatives to increase more coverage of various crops during Rabi, 2009 and also to enhance the productivity. States have been given more flexibility to utilize the funds to meet the additional demand for requirement of seed distribution component. Subsidy norms of Rice, Wheat, Jowar, Bajra and Pulses (only for Rabi/summer 2009) have been increased under various crops development schemes of Ministry of Agriculture to reduce the burden on farmers in drought affected area. Age norms of certified seed of rice, wheat and pulses have been relaxed and additional area coverage under boro/summer rice/wheat/pulses are planned for enhancing production. Additional allocation of rust resistance and terminal heat-tolerant varieties of wheat minikits has been done. Availability and supply of essential inputs such as fertilizer, additional power for irrigation has been ensured in coordination with States and various Central Ministries.

Sale of VIP quota tickets

*232. SHRIMATI KUSUM RAI:
SHRI KAMAL AKHTAR:

Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether she is aware of the media report that VIP quota for waitlisted ticket confirmation is being sold for Rs. 700/- per berth by Headquarter, Rail Bhavan;

(b) if so, the details thereof since June to October, 2009;

(c) whether officials of Directorate of Commercial are involved in selling of VIP quota to touts;

(d) if so, the action she would take against guilty officials and touts;

(e) whether a Parliamentary Committee would be constituted to enquire into the matter; and

(f) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (KUMARI MAMATA BANERJEE): (a) to (d) One print media has reported that touts pay money in Rail Bhawan to get VIP quota released. No specific information has been quoted.

(e) and (f) Efforts are made to bridge the gap between demand and supply of reserved accommodation by planning holiday special trains during the peak rush periods, putting on extra coaches to meet the day-to-day requirements and increasing the number of coaches on permanent basis in those trains which have high demand and patronage. Moreover, random checks are conducted in association with Vigilance Organisation. If any Railway official is found involved in any irregularity, the official is taken up severely. The process of checks and tightening of procedures is a continuous activity and is closely monitored.

Bhargava Committee on IIMs

*233. SHRI MANOHAR JOSHI: Will the Minister of HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government has rejected Bhargava Committee's Pan-IIM Board recommendations;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the action Government proposes to take in the matter?

THE MINISTER OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (SHRI KAPIL SIBAL): (a) to (c) The Government has consulted the Board of Governors of individual IIMs on the recommendation of the R.C. Bhargava Committee on the creation of a Pan-IIM Board. Since none of the IIMs were agreeable to the concept, the Ministry in consultation with IIMs has proposed that an informal body comprising Directors of IIM headed by the NRM will meet every six months, to deal with issues common to all IIMs.

Decrease in cultivable land due to conversion for other purposes

*234. SHRI N. BALAGANGA: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is aware of the fact that the extent of cultivable land is decreasing every year due to its conversion for other purposes affecting thereby production of foodgrains;